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NEWS

Winchester rekindles WADIA to protest threats to democracy

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Thousands of protesters at the 'Hands Off Massachusetts!' rally gather on Boston Common in early April 2025. In Winchester, residents have formed WADIA in response to the Trump admistration's policies. COURTESY PHOTO/ROBIN LUBBOCK/WBUR

A passionate group of residents in the quiet town of Winchester [illegible] rekindling a grassroots movement in defense of democracy.

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Winchester Area Democracy in Action (WADIA) was born in 2001 during a period of unrest, sparked by opposition to the impending Iraq War. Though the organization faded over time, its name and spirit have been revived by residents alarmed by growing threats to American democratic institutions.

A group of Winchester residents restarted WADIA in March in response to the Trump administration's "war on democracy," group member Alan Field said.

"Given what the new administration in Washington is doing, there's just a lot of people feeling upset in various ways, discouraged or energized or all kinds of things," Field said. "There was a need for an organization to kind of give a place for people to get together on those issues. And so we, myself and a couple friends, decided to revive WADIA because it had a good name."

Field set up a Google group, where participants can share ideas. Some ideas proposed include letter-writing campaigns, protests and donating money to organizations fighting for democracy.

The group now has about 25 members. Field sends out weekly reports that summarize the new ideas from each week. The group also holds monthly meetings via Zoom.

Although WADIA's mission has evolved since its anti-war roots, Field said, its main pro-democracy stance has stayed the same.

"This is more a pro-democracy movement, you could say, where people feel that our democracy is threatened, to say the least, or maybe it's already somewhat disassembled and great concern about that," Field said.

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Field said he spends a lot of time communicating with people about climate issues. WADIA is pushing back on policies that harm the climate, such as encouraging increased use of oil and coal, and attempting to block offshore wind development in Massachusetts. One way Field helps combat climate change on a local level is by clearing invasive plants.

WADIA members met up at local "Hands Off" protests April 5, part of a nationwide mobilization opposing what organizers describe as a coordinated power grab by political and corporate elites, including Donald Trump and Elon Musk.

Winchester resident Gloria Legvold was a key member of the original group.

In early 2001, a small group of concerned residents began gathering in the basement of the Winchester Unitarian Society. They were part of a broader movement, United for Justice with Peace, and shared a conviction that war was not the answer.

"As the potential of a war increased, several of us decided that we needed to be more politically active and really make a statement specifically about the war," Legvold said. "And so we sort of moved out of United for Justice With Peace movement into this separate Winchester Area Democracy in Action."

One of its first actions was publishing a full-page ad in the Winchester Star opposing the war, signed by residents, Legvold said. Later they launched a recurring feature in the paper called "The Progressive Perspective," led by resident Kim Whittaker. Whittaker led the Boston women's march in 2017 and was on the finance committee for Sen. Ed Markey's campaign.

Legvold organized a silent vigil, planting wooden stakes bearing
and photos of fallen U.S. soldiers near the town's war memorial, on the

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second anniversary of the Iraq War in 2005.

WADIA dissolved as members went on to other political jobs and volunteer activities, such as the Network for Social Justice and the Winchester League of Women Voters. Legvold became campaign chair for state Sen. Jason Lewis.

For Legvold, who has remained civically active since WADIA's early days, activism is about more than political outcomes.

"The most important activist activity is creating a broad community of like-minded individuals," she says, "people who are willing to be public, to speak with curiosity and civility—even with those they disagree with."

Field echoed this, encouraging residents, especially youth, to get involved.

"I've been surprised that a number of people that I know are so overwhelmed by the daily rush of bad news and daily outrages that they just can't take it anymore, and they kind of are checking out," Field said. "I think it's easier for one's mental health to actually be active and engaged and busy and feel like you're doing even a small bit."

To send messages to the whole group, email wadia@googlegroups.com or contact WADIAactivists@gmail.com.

This story is part of a partnership between the Winchester News and the Boston University Department of Journalism.

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FEATURES

‘Chicago: Teen Edition’ dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents “Chicago: Teen Edition,” a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. Set in the 1920s, this iconic production is sure to leave the audience wanting more. Performances will

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Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents ‘Syldason: You Are Welcome Here’

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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